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GEORGE WASHINGTON'S PRIMER FOR MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS:
Overlooked Keys to the French-American Victory at Yorktown

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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9 February 2004

ABSTRACT

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S PRIMER FOR MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS: OVERLOOKED KEYS TO THE FRENCH-AMERICAN VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

The current world order is such that unilateral military action on the part of the United States is highly unlikely. Consequently, when they are employed, American forces are required to function as part of an alliance or coalition. Such multinational operations present unique challenges, so it is vital the correct lessons be learned from each opportunity.

Formal procedures have been established to capture "lessons learned" from recent combined operations. However, short shrift is often given to more historical experiences. Is it possible to learn something relevant to present-day or future operations from "dated" events, such as the American Revolution?

By examining French-American operations of the Revolution through the lens of present day principles of war, military operations other than war, and multinational operations, it is evident these historical operations offer information relevant today. Failed French-American operations were found lacking in tenets such as unity of effort, unity of command, and mutual confidence. Conversely, these same principles were successfully applied in the victory at Yorktown.

Today's military leaders must understand that history can provide potential answers to questions regarding present-day and future multinational operations. Also, it is important to understand that the level of trust, comfort, and respect required to conduct military operations with our allies cannot be quickly attained.

PREFACE

This paper is not a description or analysis of the Battle of Yorktown. It is instead, an examination of the period encompassed by the signing of the French-American alliance in 1778 and the Allied defeat of the British at Yorktown in 1781. Discussion is provided regarding events of the period that impacted the French-American alliance and the multinational military operations conducted by the Allies. These events are then analyzed through the lens of present-day principles and tenets of war, military operations other than war, and multinational operations.

It is assumed that the reader of this paper is familiar with the American Revolution and conversant in modern military doctrine. However, several rather obscure events, such as the French-American attacks on Newport and Savannah, are mentioned often. As such, detailed summaries of these operations are provided as appendices for reference.

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"There is at least one thing worse than fighting with allies – And that is to fight without them"

- Sir Winston S. Churchill

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine present-day American military leaders having occasion to harbor any of the same concerns shared by George Washington and his staff in early 1781. After all, the United States today stands alone as the world's sole hyper-power, completely without peer in terms of military might. Conversely, at the beginning of 1781, the war-weary and destitute Continental Army stood on the brink of disintegration as it braced for yet another campaign against the vaunted land and naval forces of Great Britain. However, as different as these two situations are, it is likely one question now echoing the halls of the Pentagon also reverberated through Washington's headquarters at that time: How can we conduct more effective and efficient operations with our allies?

For the military leaders of today, the answer to this question lies largely in the refinement and fine-tuning of existing procedures. Abundant "lessons learned" have been captured from the host of combined operations conducted by American forces in the past decade. Additionally, published guidance and procedures, such as *Joint Publication 3-16: Joint Doctrine for Multinational Operations*, provide a solid foundation and ready reference for organizing, planning, and fighting as part of an alliance or coalition.

No such aids as these, however, were available to Washington and his staff in early 1781. At that time, nearly three years had passed since February 6, 1778, when France and

the United States had signed treaties of alliance and of amity and commerce.¹ Both French-American attempts at combined operations since the alliance, attacks against Newport, Rhode Island, in August 1778² and Savannah, Georgia, in September 1779³, had failed dismally. Yet, despite this inauspicious record, Allied forces compelled the British army of General Lord Charles Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781. How was such decisive operational success possible given the defeats suffered in previous Allied efforts? Ultimately, the French-American victory at Yorktown was achieved through the successful application of both principles of war and multinational operations. Specifically, a much greater degree of unity of effort, unity of command, and mutual confidence was applied at Yorktown than in the previous failed operations against Newport and Savannah.

KEYS TO FRENCH-AMERICAN VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

Multinational Operations, because of their considerable complexity and the variety of missions for which they may be designed, are characterized by a set of unique tenets as well as the principles of both war and military operations other than war. Because the list of these tenets and principles is quite lengthy, it is not possible to individually address the impact each one had on the events bounded by the signing of the French-American alliance in 1778 and the British surrender at Yorktown. However, when examining this period of time

¹ Colonel H.L. Landers, The Virginia Campaign and the Blockade and Siege of Yorktown 1781: Including a Brief Narrative of the French Participation in the Revolution Prior to the Southern Campaign (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1931), 31.

² Ibid., 40.

³ Dudley W. Knox, The Naval Genius of George Washington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), 53-54.

through a lens of these present-day tenets and principles, it became clear that unity of effort, unity of command, and mutual confidence figured with the most prominence.

Unity of Effort

The first challenge to the combat effectiveness of the French-American alliance after its inception in 1778 was that of unity of effort. For three long years Washington had been kept constantly off-balance by England's uncontested control of the seas and the maneuverability such control afforded British troops. "This lesson was never lost upon him. Thereafter it was naval *superiority* [emphasis in original] which he emphasized above everything, and which became the main theme of all his pleadings and the central predicate of all his plans for winning the war."⁴ With the means for achieving naval superiority now at his disposal, in the form of the French fleet, Washington was anxious to try his hand at combined operations. However, France had ideas of their own and these divergent theories on where and how to apply naval forces would prevent their decisive use prior to Yorktown.

Naturally, Washington felt North America provided France with the best stage on which to flex its naval muscles, however, France had interests in both the Caribbean and Europe. In the Caribbean, "there was the promise of the return of the islands lost in the Seven Years' War and, with the capture of British islands, the undermining of the financial strength of their chief rival."⁵ Then, Spain's entry into the war on the side of France and the United States, caused Europe to become the theater of focus for a period because a Franco-

⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁵ Stephen Conway, The War for American Independence 1775-1783 (New York: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1995), 134.

Spanish cross-channel invasion of England had been made a condition of Spain's committal to the conflict.⁶ By August of 1779 there were 30,000 French troops massed on the Channel coast awaiting transport for an invasion, and a combined Franco-Spanish fleet of 66 ships of the line was trying to force an engagement with the 39 ships mustered by the British navy to defend England.⁷ American interests, it appeared, would take a permanent backseat to the European theater if the Franco-Spanish and English fleets met in battle. Either the Allies would be victorious, resulting in a cross-channel invasion, or, in the case of a British victory, French naval power would be so degraded that sending significant naval forces to North America became impossible.

Fate, however, now smiled on the United States. The British avoided combat with the Allied fleet and by the middle of September, 1779, the French and Spanish crews were so debilitated by disease they had to sail for home.⁸ This ended the plan for an invasion of the British Isles and left France looking for options. Benjamin Franklin, at that time serving as minister plenipotentiary to the Court of France, and Lafayette, who had been in France to participate in the now cancelled invasion of England, capitalized on this opportunity to plead America's case for more military aid and succeeded brilliantly.⁹ "The French Government finally concluded that the most favorable place to prosecute war against England would be in America, and in the early part of 1780 definite plans were made to send an army and fleet of sufficient size to end the conflict that year."¹⁰ Ultimately, British blockades of French ports

⁶ Ibid., 143.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ Landers, 69-70.

¹⁰ Ibid., 71.

and unforeseen setbacks in the Caribbean delayed the arrival of some of these forces until 1781, but America's goal had been achieved by gaining France's commitment to North American operations.

French-American unity of effort had now been achieved at the strategic-level; however, success over the British hinged on the ability to practice it at the operational-level as well. This had proven difficult in the limited Allied efforts to date, and had been the express cause for failure in the August 1778 attack against Newport. In that case, a French squadron under Admiral Comte D'Estaing was tasked with providing naval support to General John Sullivan's American troops attacking Newport by land.¹¹ However, when a numerically inferior British squadron under Admiral Richard Lord Howe was sighted, D'Estaing abandoned his support of the land assault and gave chase to Howe.¹² During the pursuit, the fleets encountered a hurricane which separated them and gravely damaged five of the eleven French ships of the line. This forced D'Estaing to retire to Boston for repairs instead of reassuming his supporting position in Newport harbor.¹³ With his naval support gone, General Sullivan was forced to abandon the assault altogether.

In September 1781, when it came time to establish naval superiority in the Chesapeake Bay as part of the Allied operation against Yorktown, another French naval commander was tempted to forsake the combined objective for naval fame on the high seas. In this case, it was Admiral Comte De Grasse, but he passed the test that D'Estaing had failed. On the evening of September 5, 1781, De Grasse and his fleet engaged the British fleet of Admiral

¹¹ William C. Stinchcombe, The American Revolution and the French Alliance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 49-50.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ Ibid.

Sir Thomas Graves off the Virginia Capes.¹⁴ Fighting ceased at dark with neither side gaining an advantage, and the next two days were spent with the fleets exchanging the weather advantage, but never renewing the engagement.¹⁵ At this point, De Grasse realized he should return to the Chesapeake and he did so on September 11, 1781.

Figure 1

Admiral Comte De Grasse¹⁶



Admiral Graves, on the other hand, was indecisive and did not follow the French fleet for forty-eight hours. When the British fleet finally did arrive back at the Chesapeake, and found De Grasse had entered the bay and reestablished his blockade of Yorktown, Graves determined he would not be able to dislodge the French fleet and returned to New York.¹⁷

¹⁴ William James Morgan, “‘The Pivot Upon Which Everything Turned’: French Naval Superiority that Ensured Victory at Yorktown,” *The Iron Worker*, (Spring 1958; reprint, Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1981): 5-6 (page citation is to the reprint edition).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ USS Comte De Grasse (DD 974), <http://navysite.de/dd/dd974.htm> [9 February 2004].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

“From the hour of this decision, made necessary by the reentry of De Grasse into the bay, Cornwallis was lost.”¹⁸

Unity of Command

Another time-tested tenet of warfare absent from early French-American operations was unity of command. This was understandable given the sentiments held by the two nations at the time of their alliance. Many Americans, still flushed with confidence from the victory over the British at Saratoga, felt the United States now possessed the ability to win the war on its own.¹⁹ Thus, any French assistance should simply be incorporated into American efforts. Not surprisingly, the French saw things quite differently. From their point of view, Americans were still amateurs in the art of making war, whereas France had a long and distinguished military history. Consequently, French troops and other assets would remain under French command.

No formal discussions were ever held to address these divergent opinions before combined operations began, so commanders on both sides went out of their way to gain the approval of their allied counterparts on all issues, lest damage be done to the new alliance. This approach was typified in Washington’s initial correspondence to D’Estaing, when the latter first arrived off the American coast in 1778. In his letter to D’Estaing, Washington wrote; “...I further think it proper to assure you, that I shall upon every occasion feel the strongest inclination to facilitate such enterprises as you may form, and are pleased to communicate to me.”²⁰ Such an approach worked fine as long as a common position could

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Stinchcombe, 11.

²⁰ Knox, 46.

be reached, but when differences of opinion were encountered, no military plan could survive. The previously discussed Allied assault on Newport in August 1778 demonstrated this. When D’Estaing decided it was more advantageous to pursue the British fleet, instead of supporting Sullivan’s assault on the town, there was no overall operational commander with the authority to step in and demand D’Estaing stick to the plan. This meant D’Estaing was free to do as he desired, and the attack on Newport never developed as a result.

Had such an Allied command structure remained in place for the duration of the war, the very outcome of the conflict may have been altered. Fortunately for America, however, things changed dramatically in July 1780. It was at this time, that the army France had promised to commit to the conflict arrived in America. The force was led by General Comte de Rochambeau and consisted of 5,000 troops as well as field and siege artillery detachments.²¹ Perhaps just as important as the army itself, though, were its operating instructions. Rochambeau carried special instructions from the King of France directing:

Article I. That General Rochambeau should always be under the command of General Washington.

Article II. That all projects and plans for the campaign or for limited expeditions should be decided upon by the American general, with a view to preserve that harmony which His Majesty hopes to see between the two Commanders in chief, the generals, and the soldiers of the two nations.

Article III. The French troops, being only auxiliaries, will always yield precedence and the right of the line to the American troops.

Article IV. In conformity with the above article, American officers of the same rank and date of commission as French officers, shall take command....²²

The arrival of Rochambeau’s army did much to boost the then flagging spirits of most Americans. Additionally, the instructions that the army would operate under Washington

²¹ Landers, 74.

²² Ibid., 71-72.

proved to be, “A most gracious bit of diplomacy, conducive to flatter the national pride of a sovereign people.”²³ Most importantly of all, however, was the fact that America now had sufficient forces to take offensive action against the British and the unity of command to ensure such action was directed efficiently.

Mutual Confidence

Following World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower said that, “‘mutual confidence’ is the ‘one basic thing that will make allied commands work.’”²⁴ The same could certainly be said of the French-American alliance during the Revolution, however, the nurturing and maintenance of that mutual confidence proved to be a tremendous challenge. Allied relations weathered several storms early, stemming from the defeats at Newport and Savannah, then experienced a somewhat lengthy period of adjustment following the arrival of Rochambeau’s army in 1780.

At the center of the controversies following both Newport and Savannah was Admiral D’Estaing. His decision to pursue the British fleet of Admiral Howe instead of supporting the attack on Newport had created much anti-French sentiment. General Sullivan, who D’Estaing had been supporting, further fueled the fires of controversy with his daily orders of August 24, 1778, that “charged the French with abandoning the United States.”²⁵ Understanding that such accusations threatened to fracture the alliance, Washington immediately intervened to stifle Sullivan and issue a public explanation that cited storm

²³ Ibid., 72.

²⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-16: Joint Doctrine for Multinational Operations (Washington, DC: 5 April 2000), I-9.

²⁵ Stinchcombe, 52.

damage to the French fleet as the cause for the Newport failure.²⁶ For his part, D’Estaing helped diffuse the issue by ignoring Sullivan’s charge and remaining quiet on the matter²⁷

Admiral D’Estaing, however, was not done creating controversy for the French-American alliance. In 1779 he again ruffled feathers, this time at Savannah. Eschewing the planned French-American advance on the city, with American forces led by General Benjamin Lincoln, D’Estaing approached Savannah before Lincoln arrived. The Admiral then requested the British forces under General Augustine Prevost surrender to the King of France, making no mention at all of the Americans.²⁸ Unlike General Sullivan at Newport, however, Lincoln made no issue of D’Estaing’s error in military etiquette and instead settled down to the task at hand. In fact, although their siege of Savannah failed, Lincoln wrote a glowing endorsement of D’Estaing to Congress in which he cited the Admiral’s bravery and dedication to the American cause.²⁹

The arrival of Rochambeau’s army on American soil in 1780 was another serious test of the French-American alliance’s durability. Some Americans, members of Congress included, didn’t want the French troops at all because they feared it marked an attempt to conquer Canada for France.³⁰ Concerns also developed between the officers of the Allied armies. Many French officers, although they kept their concerns quiet, were somewhat distressed about the size and condition of the American forces and the progress they had

²⁶ Ibid., 54.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ David Lee Russell, The American Revolution in the Southern States (London: McFarland & Company, Inc. 2000), 115.

²⁹ Ibid., 124.

³⁰ Stinchcombe, 135.

made thus far in the Revolution.³¹ Such feelings were heightened even more in January 1781, when Continental divisions from New Jersey and Pennsylvania mutinied.³² Finally, Washington himself, of all people, contributed to the tension when a letter written by him fell into British hands and was subsequently printed in Loyalist newspapers. In the letter, Washington criticized the French for their lack of aggressiveness during a naval raid on the Chesapeake in the spring of 1781. Washington personally apologized to Rochambeau for the incident and the matter was forgotten.³³

Figure 2

General Comte de Rochambeau³⁴



With any tension between them now dissipated, Washington and Rochambeau set about establishing the trust, respect, and mutual confidence between the French and Americans that would be required to defeat the British. Rochambeau demanded his troops represent themselves in an honorable manner at all times and they did not disappoint their leader. As

³¹ Ibid., 138.

³² Ibid., 141.

³³ Ibid., 143-144.

³⁴ Rochambeau Images, 27 August 2002, <http://xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt/rochplus.htm> [9 February 2004].

one New England merchant stated, ““The French officers are the most civilized men I ever met. They are temperate, prudent, & [sic] extremely attentive to duty. I did not expect they would have so few vices.””³⁵ The French troops also began warming up to their American counterparts as Lafayette mentioned in a letter to Washington, “The patience and sobriety of our militia are so much admired by the French officers, that two days ago a French colonel called all his officers together to desire them to observe the good examples, which were given to the French soldiers by the American troops.”³⁶ In June 1781, the two armies linked up in New York for the first time and to the pleasant surprise of both French and Americans there was little conflict.³⁷ The mutual confidence that would be required to defeat the British had been achieved. Of this, there could be a no more glowing endorsement then that of one American officer who wrote, ““The French army and we are in the most perfect harmony, it extends from the Commander in Chief down to the lowest sentinel.””³⁸

LESSONS LEARNED

Unity of effort proved to be a critical shortcoming of the French-American attack against Newport. Given America’s hyper-power status of today, it is possible to be lulled into thinking that unity of effort no longer holds the significance it once did. After all, if our allies decide not to act with us, we can take unilateral action to achieve our desired goal. However, this line of thinking fails to consider anything except military power. One need

³⁵ Ibid., 136.

³⁶ Landers, 76.

³⁷ Stinchcombe, 146.

³⁸ Ibid.

only to look at Turkey's decision to express its rights of sovereignty during Operation Iraqi Freedom to realize that unity of purpose is still critical to our multinational operations today.

The early French-American failures at Newport and Savannah also demonstrated that before effective multinational operations can be conducted, the nations involved must develop a high degree of mutual confidence in each other. However, each of the components of mutual confidence: respect, rapport, knowledge of partners, and patience, requires a tremendous amount of time to develop.³⁹ For that reason it is imperative, especially given the global nature of the war on terror, that America be forward thinking and proactive in the identification of nations with which future operations may be required. Once these nations are identified, the Department of State, Department of Defense, and other pertinent government agencies must begin negotiations, dispatch liaisons, provide aid, or do any of the other myriad things intrinsic to developing mutual confidence. With these sorts of actions accomplished, the likelihood of cooperation from that nation in matters regarding American interests is increased.

However, at the same time we are working to make inroads with new allies, we must maintain a high degree of proficiency in operations with existing partners. This is essential because of the tremendously complex nature of modern, multinational operations. We must strive to participate in as many multinational training opportunities abroad as possible, while also taking care to invite our allies to U.S. controlled training sessions such as Red Flag, Roving Sands, and others. This will afford us the opportunity to standardize our tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as highlighting any interoperability shortfalls between U.S. and allied equipment. Related to this interoperability concern is the need to ensure

³⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, I-9 to I-10.

policies are implemented to enable us to share classified and unclassified documents and computer systems with our allies.

CONCLUSION

As the capstone event in the epic struggle for American independence, the Battle of Yorktown holds a well warranted and prominent position in the history of the United States. However, appreciation for the matter in which the French-American victory was achieved is often misplaced. Most focus exclusively on the clash of arms, considering only the siege and blockade of Yorktown as if they were climatic struggles where Allied victory hung in the balance for days. Yet in reality, the fate of Cornwallis's army was sealed the moment Admiral Graves decided against an attempt to break the French blockade and sailed for New York instead. From that point forward, it was only a question of how long the British could endure bombardment from the French siege artillery before surrendering.

To gain a true and comprehensive appreciation for the victory at Yorktown, one must frame it against the events bounded by the signing of the French-American alliance in 1778 and the British defeat in 1781. Only by doing that, and examining events like the Allied failures at Newport and Savannah, can one realize that the victory at Yorktown was really three years in the making. Unfortunately, such a broad view is seldom taken and most people never consider the arduous journey that brought the combined armies of Washington and Rochambeau to Virginia. As such, concepts like unity of effort, unity of command, and mutual confidence remain the overlooked keys to French-American victory at Yorktown.

Figure 3

Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown⁴⁰



Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown

⁴⁰ Surrender at Yorktown, http://www.fhscclassemates.com/images/surrender_cornwallis.jpg [9 February 2004].

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APPENDIX A – THE FRENCH-AMERICAN ATTACK ON NEWPORT

The first French naval presence in America came in July 1778 when Admiral Count D’Estaing arrived at the mouth of the Delaware River with 12 ships of the line and 4 frigates.⁴¹ General Washington established contact with D’ Estaing via messenger and it was decided the French would attempt to enter New York Harbor and engage the British. However, after personally scouting the approach into the harbor, D’ Estaing determined the large ships of the line could not gain safe entrance through the shallow passage near Sandy Hook. Thus, on 18 July 1778 he sent word to Washington that the French fleet could not enter New York Harbor and proposed an attack on Rhode Island instead.⁴² Newport, with its four to six thousand British troops, was vulnerable to a land-sea siege and would be a good target on which to demonstrate the powers of French-American cooperation.⁴³

Washington immediately supported D’Estaing’s proposal by sending troops under Lafayette and Nathaniel Greene to Providence, Rhode Island where they augmented the command of General John Sullivan.⁴⁴ The French-American plan called for D’Estaing to blockade the harbor, while Sullivan transported his troops to a position north of Newport then attacked down the island towards the town.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, Sullivan ran into delays in getting his militia organized and while they had taken up positions north of the town, they

⁴¹ Colonel H.L. Landers, The Virginia Campaign and the Blockade and Siege of Yorktown 1781: Including a Brief Narrative of the French Participation in the Revolution Prior to the Southern Campaign (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off. 1931), 37.

⁴² Ibid., 39.

⁴³ William C. Stinchcombe, The American Revolution and the French Alliance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press 1969), 49.

⁴⁴ Landers, 39-40.

⁴⁵ Stinchcombe, 49-50.

had not yet begun their assault by August 10. This was significant, because it was then that a British fleet under Admiral Richard Lord Howe appeared off Newport.⁴⁶

Upon sighting the numerically inferior British fleet, D'Estaing abandoned his supporting position in the harbor and gave chase to Howe. Worse still, on the night of August 11 the fleets encountered a hurricane which separated them and badly damaged five of the eleven French ships of the line⁴⁷ Upon his return to Newport on August 20, D'Estaing informed the Americans he would have to take his fleet to Boston for repairs. Greene and Lafayette tried to convince the Admiral to refit in Newport Harbor, but D'Estaing refused.⁴⁸ Without their planned naval support, the Americans were forced to cancel the Newport attack altogether.

D'Estaing's actions infuriated the Americans and General Sullivan drafted harsh protest stating as much. This message was signed by all the American generals in Newport except Lafayette.⁴⁹ News of the friction between the American forces in Newport and the French fleet reached Washington on September 1, 1778 and he immediately wrote a letter to Sullivan reminding him of the need to promote harmony in the French-American alliance.⁵⁰ D'Estaing, for his part, helped diffuse the situation by ignoring Sullivan's charges and refusing to become embroiled in controversy. Washington then provided an official public explanation of the Newport failure which attributed its demise to the storm damage inflicted

⁴⁶ Stinchcombe, 50.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Landers, 42.

⁵⁰ Landers, 44.

upon the French ships. No public mention of D'Estaing's "abandonment" of the American troops was made.⁵¹

⁵¹ Stinchcombe, 54.

APPENDIX B – THE FRENCH-AMERICAN ATTACK ON SAVANNAH

In response to letters from Major General Benjamin Lincoln, leader of the Continental and militia forces in the Southern Department⁵², Admiral Charles Hector Theodat D’Estaing arrived off the Georgia coast on September 3, 1779, with 21 ships of the line and some 5,000 men, including troops, marines and sailors.⁵³ After conducting various actions against British naval vessels along the coast, D’Estaing disembarked 3,000 troops on September 15 and made plans to attack Savannah without waiting for General Lincoln and his American troops to arrive from South Carolina.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the British forces in Savannah were fortifying the city. They stripped all available naval vessels of their guns and built 13 redoubts defended by 15 artillery batteries. Additionally, to prevent French naval vessels from getting close enough to provide supporting fire for an attack, they sank two ships and four transports in the river channel three miles below Savannah.⁵⁵

On September 16, D’Estaing sent a message to General Prevost, commander of the forces defending Savannah, requesting he surrender the city. Prevost delayed his response, and then acquired a 24-hour extension from D’Estaing by claiming he had to consult the Civil Governor about the French offer. In reality, Prevost had no intention of surrendering and had requested the delay to allow 800 reinforcements to arrive from Beaufort, South

⁵² David Lee Russell, The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies (London: McFarland & Company 2000), 101.

⁵³ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

Carolina.⁵⁶ So, on September 17, as the American forces under Lincoln joined D’Estaing, Prevost sent word that the British would not surrender the city.⁵⁷ This left the French-American forces no alternative, but to besiege Savannah. Thus, the Allied force of 6,583 men surrounded the city and laid siege to the some 2, 500 defenders.⁵⁸ Things did not begin in earnest until September 23 because it took the French until then to offload and position their naval guns for the siege. However, by that time they had moved up 53 guns and 14 mortars to support bombardment efforts.⁵⁹

The Allied bombardment terrified the city’s inhabitants but failed to persuade the British to surrender.⁶⁰ One Frenchman observed that, “the British had built defensive works ‘which were more easily repaired than damaged.’”⁶¹ Frustrated at their lack of progress, D’Estaing and Lincoln agreed the city must be assaulted. The attack was set for the morning of October 9. Unfortunately for the Allies, a deserter entered Savannah on the night of October 8 and conveyed the assault plans to General Prevost.⁶² Given this fact, the attack failed and the Allies incurred heavy casualties. “D’Estaing reported the allied men killed and wounded at Savannah on August 9, 1779, as 760 French soldiers, 61 French officers, and 312 Americans.”⁶³ Notable among the casualties were D’Estaing himself, shot in an arm and his

⁵⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁷ David Lee Russell, The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies (London: McFarland & Company 2000), 117.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118-119.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 120.

⁶¹ Ibid., 121.

⁶² Ibid., 122.

⁶³ Ibid., 123.

right calf, and General Kasmir Pulaski, the famous Polish cavalryman fighting for America, who was killed.⁶⁴

General Lincoln wanted to continue the siege, but D’Estaing decided to break off the engagement. All remaining French men and equipment were loaded back aboard their ships of the line and on November 1, 1779, D’Estaing sailed away from Georgia.⁶⁵ Despite the failure of the siege and D’Estaing’s refusal to continue it after the failed Allied assault, General Lincoln wrote a glowing endorsement of D’Estaing to Congress and he was not the only one to do so.⁶⁶ “The Georgia General Assembly was so impressed with the service given to their cause that it granted 20,000 acres of land to Admiral D’Estaing and gave ‘him all privileges, liberties, and immunities of a free citizen of the State.’”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ David Lee Russell, The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies (London: McFarland & Company 2000), 124.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 125.